

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Banisteria, Number 30, pages 35-36
© 2007 Virginia Natural History Society

FIRST SPECIMEN RECORD OF GREAT WHITE HERON (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) IN VIRGINIA--Reports of a Great White Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) near Fishers Hill, Shenandoah County, Virginia, began appearing on the Virginia Birding (VA-BIRD) listserv on 5 November 2006. In addition to these reports, a different bird was sighted during the same timeframe in Maryland at the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Kent County) and spent about one month in the area (P. Davis, pers. comm.). The Great White Heron is currently considered a subspecies of the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), and is typically restricted to coastal habitats of southern Florida (including the Keys), Cuba, the Isle of Pines, St. Thomas, Anegada, and formerly Jamaica (Butler, 1992). According to notes posted on the VA-BIRD listserv on 5 and 7 November 2006, local residents stated that the bird had been in the area for a "few months" and that it appeared "after the hurricane." Although Tropical Storm Ernesto was only briefly categorized as a hurricane, the National Weather Service (2006) reported the storm as tracking across the southern half of Florida before moving northward across the eastern third of North Carolina and Virginia (30 August to 2 September 2006) and is presumably the hurricane referred to by the local residents. Sightings of this Great White Heron (Fig. 1) were reported until near the end of November 2006. On 1 December 2006, one of us (C. Willis) contacted the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution about donating a dead specimen of a Great White Heron that was found on 28 November 2006. Just prior to this, the dead bird was found in a culvert in Tumbling Run off Battlefield Road (Va. Rt. 601). The bird was buried for one day before it was salvaged. This is the first specimen record of a Great White Heron from Virginia (USNM 602093). The complete specimen record and photographs of the living bird (courtesy Rob Simpson) can be found on the Division of Birds searchable database (<http://acsmith.si.edu/emuwebvzbirdsweb/pages/nmnh/vz/DtlQueryBirds.php>). At the time of preparation, body mass was 1,972 g. with no body fat; Butler (1992) reported a weight range of 2.1 - 2.5 kg for this species. This bird did not appear emaciated and stomach contents included fresh vegetation, crayfish parts, and mammal hair. The male (testes = 9 x 3 mm) bird was all white, with bright yellow powder down patches. Reports on the listserv that the bird was



Fig. 1. Great White Heron at Fishers Hill area in Shenandoah County, Virginia. November 2006 (photo: Rob Simpson).

struck by a car are consistent with the neck trauma found during specimen preparation.

Other sight records of the Great White Heron in Virginia include one from Daleville (Botetourt County) 1-4 June 1976 (Opengari, 1978). Three of single individuals were reported from South Holston Lake (Washington County), 15-16 October 1990 (Hall 1991), 29 August-12 September 1991 (Knight, 1992), and 25 August 1994 on the Virginia portion of the lake (Lewis, 1995). These three sightings possibly involved returning birds in at least some years (Iloff, 2003). Two, presumably different birds from South Holston Lake were reported 7-29 August 2002 and at Briery Creek Lake (Prince Edward County) 4 September-14 October 2002 (Iloff, 2003). Another bird was also sighted in Patrick County, 24-26 May 1997 (C. T. Kessler, pers. comm.), and photographed (by Jan Wiley) as it waded along a short stretch of the Smith River 0.75 miles southeast of the small community of Charity (Va. Rt. 704 and Rt. 40). Additional museum specimens of the Great White Heron should be collected when available to further document this species in Virginia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rob Simpson provided the photograph of the living bird and suggested that the specimen be donated to the Smithsonian Institution. Ray Ritenour and James Allamong coordinated the transfer of the specimen to C. Willis. Claudia Angle provided advice on preparation and catalogued the specimen. Chan Robbins and Bruce Peterjohn (USGS) reviewed the manuscript and Phil Davis provided information about the 2006 Maryland sighting. We extend a special thanks to the Virginia birders who posted notes about this bird sighting, especially L. Friedman, C. Friend, S. Heath, J. and B. J. Little, and R. Simpson.

LITERATURE CITED

- Butler, R. W. 1992. Great Blue Heron. Pp. 1-20 *In* A. Poole, P. Stettenheim, & F. Gill (eds.), *The Birds of North America*, No. 25. The Academy of Natural Sciences Philadelphia, The American Ornithologists' Union. Washington, DC:
- Hall, G. A. 1991. The autumn migration. August 1 – November 30, 1990. *Appalachian Region. American Birds* 45: 102-105.
- Iliff, M. A. 2003. The Fall migration: August through November 2002. *Middle Atlantic. North American Birds* 57: 36-41.
- Knight, R. L. 1992. Great White Heron at South Holston Lake, Tennessee and Virginia. *Migrant* 63: 1-3.
- Lewis, R. L. 1995. The season: Fall: 1 August – 30 November 1994. *Eastern Mountain Region. Migrant* 66: 25-26.
- National Weather Service. 2006. Tropical Storm Ernesto. (<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/alr/archive/Ernesto/ernesto.htm>)
- Opengari, B. 1978. High winds bring southern visitors to Daleville. *The Raven* 49: 10-11.
- Carla J. Dove
Smithsonian Institution
National Museum of Natural History
Division of Birds
MRC 116, PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013
- Roger B. Clapp
USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center,
National Museum of Natural History
Smithsonian Institution
MRC 111, PO Box 37012
Washington, DC 20013
- Crissy Willis
2799 Battlefield Road
Fishers Hill, Virginia 22626
- Banisteria*, Number 30, pages 36-37
© 2007 Virginia Natural History Society
- OBSERVATION OF EASTERN RED BATS (*LASIURUS BOREALIS*) MATING IN COASTAL VIRGINIA--At approximately 1515 h on 24 November 2006, Jethro Runco, Shannon Ehlers, and I observed an Eastern Red Bat (*Lasiurus borealis*) foraging over a brushy clearing along a road at Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNR), which lies at the southeastern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula in Northampton County, Virginia (37° 06' N, 75° 57' W). The peninsula is a patchwork of agricultural areas, brushy fields, and loblolly pine woodlots. The first bat was joined by a conspecific at approximately 1530 h. The two bats began flying very closely together and we saw what we assumed was one bat suddenly drop and land heavily in the mown grass border along the road. We located the spot and found both bats on the ground in an obvious copulatory position. The male had mounted the female, ostensibly in flight, and was on her back, with both bats facing forward. The male gripped the dorsolateral fur of the female with the thumbs of his closed wings and was biting the fur on the female's back, as if to maintain his position; the female would occasionally turn her head back and chatter, but did not appear to make any attempt to disengage or escape. The bats were virtually oblivious to us as we held cameras a few cm from them and took several photos (Fig. 1) and short videos; at one point I even matted down a few blades of grass beside the bats with my foot without any apparent disturbance to them. The bats remained engaged for approximately 30 min; then, after a few sudden flaps of their wings, they disengaged, rested briefly on the ground, and flew away.
- Published observations of mating Eastern Red Bats are rare (Stuewer, 1948; Jackson, 1961), and most breeding activity is believed to occur in August and September (Shump & Shump, 1982; Linzey, 1998). The date noted here is the latest reported; previous